

**Engineering Heritage Australia**

**National Engineering Oral History Program  
Brief Biography**

**Donald George FRY (1940- )**

**Marine Engineer**

- Birth & Family:** Born 16 January 1940 at Cairns in far north Queensland. The first child of Richard George Fry, accountant (Born circa 1916 -), and Celia Muriel Fry (nee ) ( Born circa 1916- ) Siblings Raymond Alfred Fry (1947).
- Schooling:** Attended the Southport State Primary School in 1945 for a short period. He then went to primary school in Charters Towers. He completed his Leaving Certificate in Cairns in 1954.
- Qualifications:** Diploma in Mechanical & Electrical Engineering (correspondence) – University of Queensland, c1960.
- Memberships:** FIEAust, Member Institute of Marine Engineers, Member Royal Institution of Naval Architects, Member Society of Naval Architects & Marine Engineers
- Awards**
- 1999: IEAust Peter Nicol Russell Memorial Medal
- 1998: Officer of the Order of Australia
- 1989: IEAust Qld Engineer of the Year
- 1998: Paul Harris Rotary Fellowship Award to non-members for service to engineering and the community.
- Work History**
- Donald Fry completed his leaving certificate in 1954 and took an apprenticeship as a Fitter & Turner at North Queensland Engineers & Agents (NQE), his father's engineering business in Cairns. During his apprenticeship Don studied Mechanical & Electrical Engineering at night school. This was a correspondence course and the attrition rate was so high that Don was the only student who completed the whole course. Don initially performed a range of tasks as an apprentice fitter and turner. This involved structural steel work on steam driven sawmills, bulk sugar terminals and in the rolling and welding of pipes.
- Once he had completed both his apprenticeship and his Diploma he was involved in the varied range of engineering and design work undertaken by the company. This included the design of formwork for the underground powerhouse at the Barron Falls Hydro-Electric Scheme and pipe making work for the irrigation channels for the Tinaroo Dam.
- The company was expanding and Don became involved in the first successful tender to the Royal Australian Navy for landing craft. Don developed new techniques for meeting the production demand and as a young worker he was also involved in setting up and managing all aspects of a working camp at Weipa. His

work eventually involved management, design and research. In his management role he was responsible for tendering for new projects and for managing a work force in excess of 400. The company became Cairns largest employer and Don became involved in many industrial issues especially in the years 1964-1974. Don became increasingly interested in maritime design and worked in Denmark for some time on designs for large passenger ferries.

Due to his maritime experience Don has been an advisory committee member for Det Norske Veritas monitoring high speed light craft regulations and as an advisor to the Lloyd's Register of Shipping.

At the invitation of the Queensland Premier, Rob Borbidge, who was considering the feasibility of creating a space port in far North Queensland, Don travelled to the United States to study the space industry. This study tour was followed by another when Don was a guest of the United States government. He was encouraged to view a range of engineering and other facilities associated with shipbuilding and weapons control.

Despite a very busy working life Don has found time to pursue both his musical and community interests. At the time of interview he was still working in a full time capacity although his son Mark had taken over the management of NQEA.

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Prepared by Lesley Jenkins, September 2004 from oral history interview conducted on 27 August 2004 and supporting material sourced for the interview.